

Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, ranking members Hwang (pronounced “wong”), Somers and Petit and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee:

My name is Carmel Kosztolitz, I live in Cheshire, Ct. and I am a volunteer with CAGV.

It is extremely encouraging that bills have been put forward in this committee that include provisions to address the crisis of community gun violence in Connecticut: HB-5397, SB-477 and SB-16. All of these bills have elements worthy of your consideration.

I am testifying in favor of the language in **HB-5397, An Act Declaring Gun Violence a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Office of Gun Violence Prevention**, because it incorporates five important objectives that need to be included in whichever bill is voted out of your committee:

- It declares gun violence a public health crisis.
- It will be located in the Department of Public Health where it can have the greatest impact on our constituents.
- It has mechanisms to include voices of those who are most impacted by community gun violence.
- It includes a thorough data base gathering and research capacity to support evidence-informed grant-making.
- It calls for funding that is appropriate to address the magnitude of this Public Health crisis.

In the past year, several cities and states have created life-saving Gun Violence intervention programs, such as Washington State, where lawmakers allocated \$200 million in Community Investment, including funding for Violence Intervention programs; New Mexico included Historic Violence Intervention program funding in their budget; Oregon Lawmakers allowed nearly \$40 million for Violence Intervention programs in the Legislative budget following advocacy by Moms Demand Action

volunteers. Connecticut needs to follow suit, by passing HB-5397. The state has ample resources to allocate the \$5 million called for in HB-5397. This will ensure that there is dedicated, full time staff in the DPH, such as a Director, Grant Administrator, and support staff to oversee the tremendous efforts, as laid out in the bill.

There is an urgent need to take action: last year gun homicides were the highest in 25 years, nearly double the level in 2018. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated this public health crisis in our urban communities.

I have worked for many years with people suffering from chronic mental illness, and have seen the impact of gun related suicides on families and loved ones. Mental illness is not a cause for gun violence, as many people mistakenly believe. The fact is people with mental illness are more likely to be victims of gun violence than perpetrators of violence. With more funding allocated for an Office of community gun violence prevention, we will be able to educate law enforcement officials, health professionals and the community about mental illness and protect vulnerable populations from gun violence and its tragic consequences.

I hope that the esteemed members of this Committee will evaluate the facts of the Gun Violence epidemic in our cities and communities, and agree to send HB-5397 forward to the legislature for approval.

Thank you very much for hearing my testimony today,

Sincerely,

Carmel Kosztolitz

Cheshire, CT

